IN GOPHERSPACE

VERONICA

Veronica is another Internet tool that can help you locate the information you want. This is the second installment in a four-part series on searching the Internet.

By Kevin M. Savetz

Gopher is a great menu-oriented tool for browsing and searching the Internet. It presents you with lists of files, programs, resources and services, in the form of easy-to-read, point-and-click menus. By simply picking an item from a menu, you can cruise much of the Internet using nothing more than a few keystrokes or mouse-clicks.

How do you find the gopher menu that contains the subjects and information that you want? Try veronica, another Internet searching tool that indexes the entire set of gopher menus available worldwide, and lets users quickly search for specific information throughout gopherspace. Veronica is deceptively easy to use — but there are tricks, so even if you're a seasoned Internaut, read on.

USING VERONICA

To use veronica, you need to find a gopher menu that contains a veronica gateway—usually a menu item that says **Search Gopherspace Using Veronica.**

If you don't know of a gopher that has a veronica gateway, you can always work from the master gopher server at the University of Minnesota. (**gopher.tc.umn.edu**)

```
Home Gopher server: gopher.tc.umn.edu
  1.  Information About Gopher/
  2.  Computer Information/
  3.  Discussion Groups/
  4.  Fun & Games/
  5.  Internet file server (ftp) sites/
  6.  Libraries/
  7.  News/
-> 8.  Other Gopher and Information Servers/
```

You can access veronica through many gopher servers. The master gopher at the University of Minnesota is a good one to try.

Many veronica menus offer a list of several veronica server sites. In this case, simply choose a server to use. In a perfect world, it would not matter which server you used, and all servers would give the same results. In reality, though, some servers may be more up-to-date than others, so there will be some difference in the results.

```
Other Gopher and Information Servers
  1.  All the Gopher Servers in the World/
  2.  Search All the Gopher Servers in the World
-> 3.  Search titles in Gopherspace using veronica/
  4.  Africa/
  5.  Asia/
  6.  Europe/
  7.  International Organizations/
  8.  Middle East/
  9.  North America/
 10.  Pacific/
 11.  Russia/
 12.  South America/
```

Most users will probably prefer to search by titles rather than by directory.

```
Search titles in Gopherspace using veronica
 2.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via NYSERNet) <?>
 3.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via PSINet) <?>
 4.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via SUNET) <?>
 5.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via Tachyon Communica.. <?>
 6.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
      (via U. of Manitoba) <?>
 7.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
      (via UNINETT..of Bergen) <?>
 8.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via University of Koe.. <?>
 9.  Find GOPHER DIRECTORIES by Title word(s)
     (via University of Pis.. <?>
10. Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQ) about veronica -
11. How to Compose veronica Queries
12. More veronica: Software, Index-Control Protocol,
-> 13. Search GopherSpace by Title word(s)
    (via NYSERNet)
14. Search GopherSpace by Title word(s) (via PSINet) <?>
15. Search GopherSpace by Title word(s) (via SUNET) <?>
16. Search GopherSpace by Title word(s)
    (via Tachyon Communications.. <?>
```

Veronica servers are located around the world.

DIFFERENT SEARCHES

You will usually see two sorts of veronica searches: **Search Gopherspace by Title Words** and **Search Gopher Directories by Title Words.** The former searches everything in gopherspace, menu names as well as the titles of documents themselves. The resources may be of any type of data, including ASCII text, gopher directories, images and binary files.

Search Gopher Directories is a more limited search, which will only find gopher menu items whose titles contain your keywords. This type of search can be useful to find only major holdings of information related to your subject. After veronica finds the relevant gopher directories, you can point and click to open them up and see the contents in more detail.

To try a simple search, pick **Search Gopherspace by Title Words** and enter **Newt Gingrich** (or anything else, for that matter). The search is not case sensitive. In a moment, veronica will search its pre-built index of gopherspace and present you with your own customized menu (hopefully) filled with relevant information.

Veronica finds resources by searching for specific words in document titles (the name of the resource as it appears on the menu of its home gopher server). It does not do a full-text search of the contents of documents. (There isn't a tool within gopher that lets you search through document text. However, there is another Internet tool for that job—the Wide Area Information Server—which we'll look at in the next issue.)

```
Search GopherSpace by Title word(s)
(via NYSERNet): newt gingrich
-> 1. Gingrich, Newt    Dist:06      - NPAT
   2. Gingrich, Newt    Dist:06      - NPAT
   3. U.S. ELECTION:  NEWT GINGRICH PROFILE
      By PAULA WOLFSON/CONGRESS
   4. *NEWT GINGRICH* Speaker of the House
      [  23] bcote@cra..
   5. Notes on HR4079, Newt Gingrich,
      Phil Gramm and Bill Bennett
   6. U.S. ELECTION:  NEWT GINGRICH PROFILE
      By PAULA WOLFSON/CONGRESS
   7. U.S. ELECTION:  NEWT GINGRICH PROFILE
      By PAULA WOLFSON/CONGRESS
   8. U.S. ELECTION:  NEWT GINGRICH PROFILE
      By PAULA WOLFSON/CONGRESS
   9. Gingrich, Newt (BIO)
```

After veronica presents you with your search results, you can point and click to open them up.

MORE POWERFUL SEARCHES

A basic search is simple enough, but veronica allows more robust searches as well. Veronica's search functions are basic and useful, but only provide basic boolean searches of menu titles and document names. You can't search by date or by author.

Veronica understands the logical operators AND, OR and NOT, as well as parentheses to separate search items. Using a simple multiple-word query produces the same results as using **AND** between the words. **Newt Gingrich** is the same query as **Newt AND Gingrich.**

An asterisk at the end of a search word will match all words beginning with your prefix. Searching for **Newt*** might hit on newt, newton, newts and newtonian. (The asterisk character may be used only at the end of words. The search will fail if you try to put it anywhere else.)

There is also an **OR** operator, which you can use in conjunction with parentheses to broaden searches. For instance, you might search for **insect AND (iguana OR chameleon).**

Finally, there's the **NOT** operator, which you can use to explicitly ignore words or phrases in titles. For instance, a search of **Newt NOT Gingrich** will give you more information about salamanders than Republicans.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF VERONICA

Unfortunately, veronica suffers from a few annoying problems. Although there are about eight veronica servers on the Internet, that's not enough. It is all too common when searching with veronica to get the message "Too many connections, try again soon," instead of a long list of hits.

Further, gopher menu items are often terse to the point of obscurity when viewed out of the context of their menu. So, it is not obvious whether the results of a veronica search are different items or multiple listings with the same name.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Another all-too-common reply from veronica is the message "too many items found," which reports that the phrase you've used is too broad. There were too many hits. There are several ways to address this problem. First, ask veronica to show you more than the default number of hits (200) by adding **-m** and a number to your search. **Newt -m500** will bump the number of potential hits to 500.

Another way to deal with the "too many items found" message is to narrow the search by adding keywords. For instance, instead of searching for **insect**, search for **insect AND poison**.

Be sure to put less common words first followed by more common ones. In multi-word searches, veronica searches for the first word first, then moves on to the next keyword. In the interest of performance, if there are too many hits on the first word, veronica gives up with the "too many items" message before scanning the rest of the words. I searched for **David Letterman** and received the "too many items" message, but searching for **Letterman David** worked. The word "David" probably hit thousands of times, causing veronica to give up early. The word "Letterman" hit relatively few times, so the program could successfully search.

Even better, you can ask veronica to show you only certain types of menu items. If you are looking for a text file with the word "insect" in the title, you can search for only text files, avoiding programs, sound files and other unwanted information. You can do this by adding **-t** and a code number to your search. You might try **insect and poison -t1** to search only for text files with the words "insect" and "poison" in its name.

```
-t1 Text file
-t2 Directory
-t3 CSO phonebook server
-t4 BinHexed Mac file
-t5 DOS binary archive
-t6 UNIX uuencoded file
-t7 Index-Search server
-t8 Pointer to a Telnet session
-t9 Binary file
```

Here are some menu items and their code numbers.

You can combine veronica's search functions to create very specific searches: **insect* AND (spider OR grasshopper) -t4 -m10** would show you no more than 10 BinHexed Macintosh programs whose descriptions include the word "insect" or "insects" and "spider" or "grasshopper."

Finally, just in case you were wondering, veronica is an acronym for Very Easy Rodent-Oriented Net-wide Index to Computerized Archives. Strange name, but a great tool. When you know what you are looking for, but don't know where in gopherspace to look, ask veronica. **OA**

Kevin M. Savetz **(savetz@northcoast.com)** *is a regular contributor to* ONLINE ACCESS. *He is author of* ***Your Internet Consultant-the FAQs of Life Online*** *(Sams Publishing) and publishes the* ***Internet Services FAQ*** *and the* ***Unofficial Internet Book List.***